THEORY OF CHANGE

How do domestic violence programs promote survivors’ social and emotional well-being?

FIGURE 1 on the attached page illustrates the Theory of Change guiding the work of domestic violence (DV) programs. Specifically, the long-term objective of domestic violence programs is to enhance survivors’ and their children’s well-being. There is ample empirical evidence demonstrating that social and emotional well-being is evidenced by: (1) self-efficacy, (2) hopefulness, (3) social connectedness, (4) safety, (5) having adequate social and economic opportunities, (6) economic stability, (7) enhanced justice, and (8) good physical, emotional and spiritual health. Domestic violence programs are invested in impacting these eight factors for both survivors and their children through efforts targeting multiple levels of change. Their work is designed not only to create intrapersonal change in survivors’ thinking, belief systems, and emotions, but also to create the interpersonal and social changes necessary for the outcomes to be achieved.

Domestic Violence programs engage in a wide range of activities designed to positively impact the intrapersonal, interpersonal and social predictors of well-being for both survivors and their children. Specifically, they work to increase women’s and children’s sense of self-efficacy as well as their hope for the future, and directly increase their access to community resources, opportunities, and supports (including social support). Recognizing that well-being is not independent from community-level factors, staff do not focus solely on working with individual survivors. They also engage in a variety of efforts to create communities that hold offenders accountable, promote justice and survivor safety, and provide adequate resources and opportunities for all community members. This is accomplished through systems-level advocacy efforts, prevention activities, community education activities, and collaborative community actions.

Short-term improvements in survivors’ and their children’s lives create a positive spiral, resulting in more positive social and emotional well-being over time. While the actual programs may differ across agencies (e.g., shelter, counseling, advocacy, transitional housing, supervised visitation, children’s programs, support groups), services for both survivors and their children tend to share the eight key features described in the far left column of Figure 1.

Program Activities                       Program Outcomes                              Factors Predicting Well-Being
Common Elements of Program Components
1. Provide information (about rights, options, domestic violence, trauma, sociopolitical setting)
2. Safety plan
3. Build skills (e.g., coping, emotion regulation, problem solving, parenting, resource attainment)
4. Offer encouragement, empathy and respect
5. Supportive counseling
6. Increase access to community resources and opportunities
7. Increase social support and community connections
8. Community change and systems change work

Intrapersonal Changes:
Cognitive and behavioral changes: increased knowledge, skills, critical consciousness
Emotional changes: sense of self, reduced distress

Interpersonal and Social Changes:
Increased access to community resources
Strong mother-child bond
Effective interpersonal coping strategies
Increased support, community connections
Enhanced justice

Intrapersonal Predictors of Well-Being
Self-efficacy
Hopefulness

Interpersonal and Social Predictors of Well-Being
Social connectedness
Positive relationships with others
Adequate social and economic opportunities
Economic stability
Safety
Positive physical, emotional and spiritual

Social and Emotional Well-Being
Community Well-Being

Important Contextual Factors Impacting Work and Success
Programs conduct all of their work in collaboration with other community members and policy makers
Extent to which community supports victim safety, offender accountability, and provides resources and